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ABSTRACT

More is being written about the need for psychology to address the diversity that exists in the population today. One way to do this is by incorporating diversity into general psychology courses. That would help prepare majors early on for client diversity. It would also insure that multiple perspectives are represented in class, which could enhance the personal development of students taking the course. It may even increase the number of underrepresented groups who enter psychology. This paper presents three small-group activities that can be used in the classroom to address diversity topics. They cover topics that don't traditionally lend themselves easily to diversity (research methods, emotions/motivation, and cognition/language). By incorporating this into general psychology students will understand and become sensitive to the similarities and differences among all people. (JDM)

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Classroom Activities To Enhance Student Learning about Diversity Issues

Valerie Whittlesey

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Symposium: Classroom Activities to Enhance Student Learning about Diversity Issues

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APA Meeting 2001, San Francisco

The December, 1998 issue of the American Psychological Association Monitor included articles on how the field of psychology must address the diversity that exists in the population. Tomes (1998) indicates that minority groups are expected to make up approximately half of the U.S. population by 2050 compared with 25% today and less than 20% in 1970.

According to the U. S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2000), the U.S. workforce will become diverse by 2008. Whites will make up a decreasing share of the labor force, from 73.9 to 70.7%. Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians are projected to comprise an increasing share of the labor force by 2008 – 10.4 to 12.7%, 11.6 to 12.4%, and 4.6 to 5.7%, respectively.

The number of men and women in the labor force will grow, but the number of men will grow at a slower rate than in the past. Between 1998 and 2008, men's share of the labor force is expected to decrease from 53.7 to 52.5%, while women's share is expected to increase from 46.3 to 47.5%.

When looking at the labor force by age, workers 45 and older, are projected to increase from 33 to 40% of the labor force from 1998 to 2008, due to the aging baby-boom generation.

When we look at how these increases in ethnic minorities, females, and older people will affect schools, jobs, and politics, it is obvious that the country's future will be

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influenced by these diverse groups. Future grades of psychology as well as all workers will need an understanding and ability to interact with these various groups. Although these figures focus on ethnic minority groups, females, and the elderly, other types of diversity are equally important and are increasing in our society and workforce: homosexuals and disabled people, etc.

There are many reasons for incorporating diversity into the general psychology course: 1) it helps prepare our majors early on for an increasingly diverse and global society, 2) it enhances the quality of education we offer students who take the course, 3) it is fair and equitable ensuring that all perspectives are presented in the course, 4) it may increase the number of underrepresented groups who enter psychology, 5) it enhances the personal development of students who take the course.

Whitten (1993) suggests that small group activities devoted to addressing diversity topics are effective in psychology classes. Three small group activities that correspond to some of the chapters covered in most general psychology classes are provided (Whittlesey, 2000). I particularly selected activities from chapters that traditionally don't lend themselves as easily to diversity. For example, we can think very readily of examples of how diversity can be incorporated into developmental psychology, social psychology, and abnormal psychology. I have chosen activities that can be used with the Research Methods, Emotions/Motivation, and Cognition/Language chapters.

Activity 1 – Research Methods

This activity acquaints students with four psychology journals. The Psychology of Women Quarterly is devoted to research on the psychology of women. The Journal of Black Psychology is devoted to research on the psychology of African Americans. The

Journal of Cross-Cultured Psychology is devoted to cross-cultural research, and the Journal of Homosexuals is devoted to research on homosexuality. All of these journals are available in most college or university libraries. Student groups should answer questions based on reading an article from one of the journals. The instructor may want to make sure that all of the journals are covered by the class.

1) Who is the general editor of this journal?
2) What is the journal's statement on the content of the articles in the journal?
3) What is the title of the article you selected?
4) What hypothesis does the author want to study?
5) What is the significance of the topic?
6) What were the techniques used in the study?
7) Who was studied and why?
8) How did the author summarize the findings?
9) Did the findings turn out as expected? Why or why not?
10) Does the article contribute to the field of the psychology of women, African American psychology, cross-cultural psychology, or psychology of homosexuality?
11) Do you agree with the findings?
12) Why are journals such as the Psychology of Women Quarterly, Journal of Black Psychology, Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, and Journal of Homosexuality important to the field of psychology?

Activity 2 – Eating Habits

This activity demonstrates how the various ethnic and cultural groups in this country have contributed to the diversity of eating habits among Americans. "Melting pot" has

been used to describe the mix of populations living in the United States. Food and food habits are part of that mix. All of us eat many of the foods listed below. Although many of these foods have become part of the American diet, they originated in other parts of the world and serve as diet staples there. Identify the country where the following foods, beverages, and dishes originated.

1) fish and chips (Great Britain)
2) egg roll (China)
3) nachos (Mexico)
4) Dijon mustard (France)
5) Ravioli (Italy)
6) Grits (America – Native Americans)
7) Goulash (Hungary)
8) Fried okra (West Africa)
9) Rum (Caribbean)

Activity 3 – English---Official U.S. Language

This activity encourages students to think about whether English should be declared the official U.S. language and the impact such a law would have on bilingual education. In 1986, California passed a referendum declaring English as its official language. Other states following suit, each proclaiming their desire to protect a common language and culture in the United States. These laws require children who can't speak English or children who are bilingual (speak more than one language) to be taught only English in school. There are supporters and opponents of English-only laws. In small groups,

students should think of as many arguments for and against English-only laws as possible.

Pro Arguments

1) Proponents of English-only laws believe they are vital for forging national unity and easing communication in education, business, and everyday life. They argue that immigrants who do not learn English are destined to become poverty-stricken, marginal members of society.
2) English-only proponents believe that non-English-speaking children should be instructed from the start like all other American children – in English. According to this view, time spent communicating in the child's tongue subtracts from English language achievement.
3) English-only supporters often point to Canada, which recognizes the linguistic rights of its French-speaking minority, but where friction between English- and French-speaking groups is intense.

Con Arguments

1) Opponents point our that when a country imposes a national language, ethnic minorities usually understand it as the majority's attempt to assert dominance. They react by striving all the harder to retain their linguistic heritage.
2) Many educators are committed to truly bilingual education – developing the minority child's native language while fostering mastery of English. They let children know that their heritage is respected. In addition, by avoiding abrupt submersion in an English-speaking environment, bilingual education prevents semilingualism, or inadequate proficiency in both languages. When minority

children experience gradual loss of the first language as a result of being taught the second, they end up limited in both languages for a time, a circumstance that leads to serious academic difficulties.

Conclusion

As we incorporate diversity into General Psychology, students will understand and become sensitive to the differences between us and the similarities among all of us.

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